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ABSTRACT

Because children are exposed to highly professional sales pitches on television and because the old material produced by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis is outdated and in error, a new tool for the analysis of propaganda and persuasion is called for. Such a tool is the intensify/downplay pattern analysis chart, which includes the basic intensify/downplay pattern and paragraphs discussing propaganda, persuasion, and advertising. The chart has received considerable favorable comment from scholars and from respondents outside the academic community, including the National Council of Teachers of English Committee on Public Doublespeak. As a simplified tool for analyzing any human communication (verbal, nonverbal, and symbolic), it has the virtue of making clear not only what has been emphasized in a particular pitch but also what has been deemphasized. It can be used by children as well as by such groups as Nader's Raiders and Congressional committees. (A copy of the pattern accompanies the paper.) (TJ)

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Patterns of Propaganda and Persuasion

By Hugh Rank

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Last year at this time, the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak endorsed my "intensify/downplay" pattern as a useful way to analyze propaganda and persuasion. Today, I want to show you the background for this: the intent and the goal, the method and the process, the classification principles involved, some previously-unpublished commentary by other scholars, and finally some suggested uses for this pattern.

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The goal was stated in the 1971 NCTE resolution which encouraged teachers to help children learn how to cope with political and commercial propaganda. In 1971, American advertising expenditures exceeded 20 billion dollars. In the past six years, this spending has almost doubled: in 1977, over 37 billion dollars. Children entering first grade this year have been exposed to the most sustained, most sophisticated propaganda blitz in human history. During their lifetime, American advertisers have spent 195 billion dollars to persuade us to buy certain products. During this same time, corporations, governments and individual politicians have also spent billions of dollars to persuade us to favor their policies.

People have always tried to persuade others, but never before in human history has there been such a situation of inequality, especially in regard to children. In the past, the parent could act,in some sense,as a shield for the child. But this is the first generation in human history in which that protection has been taken away. We must recognize we are a transitional generation. People today in their sixties and seventies can remember a world in which no salesperson would directly address a young child. Could you even imagine in 1900 or 1910, some one coming up to children on the street and trying to sell them something. But today, T.V. is used as a babysitter and the sales messages are delivered directly, and constantly. These persuasive messages are not the awkward attempts of bumblers or amateurs, but complex products of sophisticated teams of researchers, psychologists, writers, artists, and media strategists.

Rhetoric is concerned with probabilities. If we had certitude about the future, there would be no arguments. At present, we live in a time of relative peacefulness, but there does exist the potential for a serious political propaganda blitz. The media, the sophistication and the skill, the money, the tools and the computers - all of the necessary ingredients for a highly sophisticated political propaganda

blitz now exist. Citizens should be aware of this potential for danger, and the safeguards needed through education, legislation and a free press. Those of us who are committed to the word, - the teachers and law makers, the journalists and the writers of this society - have a special interest and obligation in the techniques of persuasion and how they are used within our society.

My own work with the committee began in 1972. At the time,I was working on a book about classification theory. When I heard of the goals of the committee, I thought they were very significant, but also very vague because of the difficulty of getting agreement on high-level abstractions such as "doublespeak," "gobbledegook," or whatever other words were used. So I started, personally, with a goal of sorting out and trying to clarify issues.

Although I didn't have any financial aid,I did have the freedom within my university to experiment in my courses and I had the invaluable help from a dozen different groups of students over a four year period. At first, some of them helped me define some basic issues and dig up basic data. In the summer of 1972, my eight students worked with me searching out what was being taught in current textbooks in the schools, and reading the 1971 FTC reports to get an overview of the major issues and problems of the advertisers.

I re-sorted about two dozen existing methods, seeking for common denominators.I spent a great deal of time shuffling 3x5 cards, looking for patterns. I spent a great deal of time watching tv, reading ads,listening to people talk, and taking notes. I tried many experiments with my classes; many of my students were high school teachers who, in turn, tried out ideas on their students. Through this kind of trial-and-error, I felt I was making progress in producing a useful way for young people to understand persuasion techniques. By this time I had accumulated thousands of notes, but I thought I had to make a prudential decision to "go public" with these ideas before my own endurance and enthusiasm waned. Eventually I will complete a book, articulating the whole concept as I perceive it. But, first priority always was the "simple" tool.

So that you may see the premises behind the inten ify/downplay schema, let me show you the assumptions I make about classification theory. Consider these as my basic axioms: (1) Anything c n be classified in an almost infinite number of ways; (2) All of these classifications may be true, simultaneously; (3) The importance depends upon the observer's interest.

To clarify these concepts to my own students I usually ask for a volunteer, an extrovert willing to stand in front of the class. Then I ask the other students to put the volunteer into a class or category. Usually, there's a silence for a few minutes; no one in class quite knows what I am doing. Then someone finally will say, "he's a boy" or she's a girl." And I, acting as secretary, write that work on the blackboard. A little bit later somebody usually says "white" or "black" depending on skin color. (Later, I will come back to this point, noting Gordon Allport's book on prejudice in which he points out that the two most obvious recognizable classifications in our culture are sex and skin color.) Then the pace usually picks up, and people start calling out other categories which they perceive ("tall," "wearing glasses," "smiling," "standing," "foot-tapping") and those which they can easily infer ("student," "freshman student"). With a little bit of help, a class can soon generate a hundred or so categories: space and time relationships, ("20th century person," "western-hemispere living," "earthling"); family relationship ("son or daughter," "sister or brother," "uncle or aunt," "niece or nephew"); potential states (potentially a "mother or potentially a "father," potentially a "doctor," potentially a "teacher"); habitual qualities ("cheerful," "hardworking"); more temporary attitudes ("smiling," "footstomping").

As we go through this, I can point out that some of these categories reside within the person, and some categories (such as "beautiful," "handsome," "attractive")

are subjective opinions expressed by some, but not all, of the people there. However, my major point is to fill up the blackboard very quickly, with as many as possible categories; then, challenging the class, I ask them which one is true?

The class will scan the board and rather quickly come to the conclusion that all are true. I emphasize that all could be true, simultaneously. (Here, I add a negative corrolary to this axioms All could be true, simultaneously; however, some may be false. To illustrate this, I will put up two different numbers as statements about the person's age so that a deliberately contradictory relationship is set up where both could not be true at the same time. This usually starts a long side-track about truth, certitude, inductive reasoning, contrary and contradictory relationships.)

But I wish here to go to the next point, which is most critical and most commonly misunderstood. When I ask my class which is the most important item on the board, which is the most important category for this person, the arguments really start. The most common first response is usually that "she's a woman" or that "he's a black." "Does it make any difference," I ask, "at a grocery store checkout whether you are a woman or a man a black or a white, are you not charged the same for your groceries at that store?" Or I might use the example of the bartender who doesn't care whether you are black or white, male or female, just as long as you are in the categories of being "of age," having money and being reasonably sober. Does anyone really care whether you are a glasses wearer? Or a brown shoe wearer? Or a wristwatch wearer? Or a sweater wearer? Suddenly people start recognizing that "yes" some observers care: for example, makers and manufacturers and advertisers of glasses, or shoes, or sweaters and so on, do not care whether we are x, y, or z,

just as long as they can identify us as either a customer, potential customer or that sort of thing. The key point is that the importance of the category depends on the observer's interest. (I have to make a qualification here also. I simply point out to the class that some philosophers, Aquinas, for example, will argue that essence is most important, that all other things are accidents. Most modern philosophers will not subscribe to this; however to please any Thomists around, I simply say "fine, if you want to hold that the essence is most important you may, but let's consider everything else. Which of all of the other categories is most important?"

These are three basic, very important, principles of classification. Normally, in a literature course, I would immediately apply this to the kinds of problems that students are faced with when they go to the library. For example, they will pick up Leary's book Articles on American Literature which lists some 600 articles written about Melvile's Moby Dick. In class, I'll pass out a Xeroxed page giving some idea of the scholarship done on Moby Dick and reiterate the point that anything can be classified in an almost infinite number of ways, all could be true simultaneously, and that importance depends on the observer's interest. For example, a psychiatrist will analyze Moby Dick differently than a Naval historian, someone who is interested in sentence style will focus on different things than someone who is interested in characterization and so on. It seems to help students from being overwhelmed, to recognize that scholars are not doing busy work nor necessarily repeating themselves. My stress, over and over, is on the multiplicity and simultaneousness of classification and of the relative importance assigned by observers.

These thoughts on classification theory are not a digression, but a prelude to establish my concern of the complexities of classification theory. If you wish I could speak for a few more moments doing a little name-dropping and using the appropriate jargon, sprinkling the lecture with workd such as "taxonomies" "matrices" and "parameters," whatever the current jargon of IS & R people and taxonomists and so on. But since I have tried to strip away other peoples' jargon, I must also strip away my own. I won't even call my work an "elegant" schema, I will simply refer to it as a "pattern."

Thus I end up with a very simple two-part diagram of "intensify" and "downplay" and with this I propose to analyze all of the human communication, verbal, nonverbal, and symbolic systems. It's almost like I'm leaving myself open to attack as a super-simplifier" as Alan Tofler noted in Future Shock (page 361), as someone "searching for a unitary solution and investing every idea with universal relevance." Tofler notes that these people "evade the rich complexity of reality," yet, he also points out that "every information scientist recognizes that some of these strategies may, indeed, be necessary in overload situations."

I think we are in an overload situation. Among some academics there is a knee-jerk reaction; any attempt at simplifying is called "over-simplifying," a handy cliché of attack language, usually in the same sentence as "so-called" and "self-styled" reformer. But I'm willing to run the risk of being called an oversimplifier, because my goal is to not to generate pedantic explications for a few, but to provide some reasonable guidelines for the many. The danger of information overload, of confusion and chaos, and the resultant apathy and stasis to which confusion often leads us to, these are real dangers in our society today.

Long before Future Shock was written, Henry Adams recognized the difficulty and the dilemma. He expressed it this way: "From cradle to grave, this problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education."

The basic human dilemma is that we need to generalize, to categorize, to intensity the similarities and downplay the differences of items within a category. But, we also need to define, to distinguish differences, to make qualifications and to recognize the individual, that is, to intensify the differences and to downplay the similarities.

In February 1976, I printed several hundred copies of a large wall chart. In the center was the basic intensify/downplay pattern. At both sides, explanatory paragraphs summarized my premises and assumptions about propaganda, persuasion, advertising and some key ideas about multiplicity, simultaneousness and degree.

In March 1976, I mailed this chart to a hundred experts, scholars, writers and editors in various language-related fields. The chart was accompanied by a cover letter saying"this is a trial balloon for a coherent effort, I do not speak for the NCTE of for the committee, but as an individual. My goal is to create a useful flexible structure on which others could build a more organized systematic program to teach kids how to recognize patterns of persuasion."

I noted that the old Institute for Propaganda Analyses list was most commonly used in textbooks today, but was outdated and in error. Other text books, which treated propaganda analysis, often used alphabetical lists or focused on the fallacies of formal logic. None of these approaches gave kids the ability to analyze emotional appeals, image-building techniques, nonverbal communication, and so on. Nor did these other approaches pay any attention to what I called "the strategy of silence," the use of omission, diversions and confusion. I stated then: "no classification system is perfect; this schema is not a panacea. But it is useful to teach kids how to recognize patterns and it is better than anything available today."

Quoting Emerson, I noted that "action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential." Quoting Clausewitz, I exhorted:"Plan with deliberation; execute with violence." After four years of work on this schema, I thought this was the appropriate time for action. I wrote: "Realistically, I believe that

unfunded, part-time, volunteer, loosely-organized national committes have slim chances for survival: enthusiasm wanes, members get pressed by their won workloads, communication is slow and fragmented, meetings are infrequent, and are often sidtracked by trivia, randomness, and current issues." I was rather surprised that the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak had sustained momentum for so long. But, if we expected to do anything coherent, I thought that it was time for a bold stroke, to endorse something that could be a very useful structure, that could be a good replacement for that old IPA list.

Thus I sent the chart and the letter to a hundred people and received almost a 50 percent response, which I think is phenomenal because I was dealing with many nationally-known scholars, editors, and writers: very busy and involved people. Of these responses only three were negative. If someone had made a major argument against my proposal, I was prepared to abort the whole thing. But the negative responses were not, in my judgment, damning. One eminent scholar replied with a whole paragraph condemning my use of the word "kids" instead of "children;" then he spent another paragraph ranting about liberal academics who attack conservative polititians. Another negative response was a substantial disagreement about a basic premise of classification theory. The respondent objected to my statement "that all taxonomies are arbitrary;" and I, in turn, objected to his position that certain classifications were "natural" or intrinsically more important than others. Another person objected that the approach was too simplistic;

But the rest of the response was overwhelming favorable. Most of the scholars recognized the tightrope I was walking. Dwight Bolinger, recently retired from Harvard University and from the Presidency of the Linguistic Society of America, said: "I believe that it offers as provacative a set of starting points as could be devised." Father Walter Ong, from St. Louis University,

called it "a good basic schema. Oversimplified, as it itself acknowledges, but operable as a starting design." Louis Kampf, from MIT, called it "interesting and useful." Edward Corbett, from Ohio State University, said: "I think the three devices for intensifying and the three devices for downplaying that you have come up with are sound, and may be even exhaustive, in their comprehensiveness." Richard Lloyd-Jones of Iowa noted: "I think it is a good pattern, a good generative construction. I hope that it would stimulate text book writers at all levels." Ernest Page, of San Diego State University, said "a simple, even "elegant," taxonomy...it is hoped that the committee members, as well as textbook and article writers, utilize the insights and information contained in the Schema." H. Lee Gershuny, of CUNY said: "The Intensify/Downplay Schema is impressive in being (1) comprehensive, (2) refined and (3) practical for propaganda analysis ....its strength lies in the flexibility with which you recommend its application ....the Rank Schema relates and consolidates patterns and concepts of communication processes instead of isolating idiosyncrasies of different systems. This is what we've been looking for - the Schema is ingenious."

Many scholars made qualifications. Certainly all of us are going to be cautious about anything that simplifies. For example, Ross Winterowd of the University of Southern California said: "I like it and think it can be useful. Its virtue is that it can be comprehended almost at a glance. Its liability is that it can be comprehended almost at a glance. In other, words it's richly heuristic for responsible people and a cheap way out for dopes. But then any heuristic - from Kenneth Burke's to Young, Becker, and Pike's - is a cheap way out for dopes. I support your intention to give it wide dissemination." Robert Gorrell, of the University of Nevada, said: "It seems to be to be useful and

obviously more comprehensive and more thorough than the popular lists of techniques....Because the chart is so comprehensive, its main difficulty will probably be in directing it to specific applications....The inevitable temptation is to suggest amplification of almost every explanation on the chart, trying to get in details that may not be obviously suggested."

Nearly all the letters that I received in response suggested that I add more about one point or another, that I explain more. I could explain more. My problem was in condensing, in writing tightly. I had established as my goal creating something which could be easily reproduced on two facing pages of a standard size book. This meant that I would be dictated, mechanically, by certain elements: for example, eight-point type size is the smallest which most people can read. Thus, I set as my limits: six paragraphs of thirteen lines each, each line containing about 42 characters. The final printed version has an additional introductory paragraph of six lines on one side of the page and two lines of attribution on the other side.

Other respondents, outside the academic community, also made favorable statements. Daryle Feldman, Editor of the Chicago Daily News replied "whether your new approach to propaganda analysis satisfies the traditional academic, I cannot say, but it seems to me that you have given a sensible framework to a comples subject." Joan Bernstein, the Acting Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection, of the Federal Trade Commission, said: "From the perspective of the Bureau of Consumer Protection, which monitors and regulates deception and unfairness in advertising and other promotional methods, there is a need for increased public awareness of the subtleties of methods of public persuasion.

The activities of the Bureau focus not only on overt deception, but also on the misleading nature of technical truths, half-truths, and the omission of material facts in advertising. We are also concerned that disclosures in advertising are made in a clear and conspicuous manner. Your proposed chart, particularily in its focus on composition, omission and diversion, address these problems and hopefully will enable the public to recognize possible deception in advertising."

Some of my colleagues objected to some statements which I had made in the side commentary. For example, I tolerate the existence of commercial advertising in our society; some of my colleagues would wish to prohibit all but informational advertising. My concern focuses not on the motive or intent of the persuader, but on the techniques of the persuader.

Based on the overall favorable response, the core of the schema was sent to the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak for their endorsement. In July 1976, I made a formal motion and supported it with extracts from the responses. The committee voted, by a wide majority, to endorse it. The only specific complaint that I heard from a committee member was that he felt that such a thing need not be formally endorsed. If the schema were good, he agrued, it would by itself attract attention: a sort of "truth will win" argument. My estimate of the situation is different. While truth might win in the long run, there are certain realities in the present situation which must be faced: (1) the dollar volume of advertising is increasing and accelerating rapidly; (2) there is no coherent structure within the schools, nor is there any on the horizon in the near future; (3) this was a five year project, not the product of a "weekend workshop" or a quick "brainstorming" session. The schema is arbitrary, but not capricious.

I am a writer, and this is coherent responsible writing. But I know that even if I were to write the world's best text book, it would only receive X percent of any market because there are fifty or a hundred textbook publishers. I know the realities about textbook adoptions by committees and departments. I know the diversity of interests within the teaching of English. To achieve the goal of widespread distribution, my judgement is that it's much better, realistically, to get this pattern into as many textbooks as possible, to replace many of the existing "laundry lists" which are inaccurate and incomplete.

The simple two-part pattern of intensify/downplay is the easiest to teach and the most useful with younger children. One can take any product or any policy and point out rather easily, for example, that the advertisers of cigarettes will intensify pleasure and immediate enjoyment, but they would also downplay the health hazards. This pattern gives greater attention to that which is not said, that which is downplayed or omitted. As such, it is an extremely useful.

I have found that very young students will recognize and respond to this. One can divide a blackboard, or piece of paper, either horizontally or vertically in one section, put the word "intensify" with a "plus" sign, in the other section put the word downplay with a "minus" symbol. Allow students to suggest whatever topic or whatever piece of advertising or political propaganda they wish. This is a very simple kind of pattern, but it does focus on the basic selection/omission process.

A good classroom exercise here is to have students close their eyes for a moment. Ask them to notice, when they open their eyes, that they perceive simultaneously,

everything at once. Then ask them either to say something, or to write something. They must write in sequence: one word following another word, and that any word or any concept or any idea that they choose automatically omits and eliminates everything else. They can never exhaust in words, sequentially, that which they perceive spontaneously. To you, this may seem to be a truism. But I have found that many people have not been exposed to this, or do not have a sufficient awareness of the importance of our basic selection/omission process in communication.

This two-part pattern is useful not only with younger children, but also in many situations where it helps clarify and helps to point out the omissions. For example, we are all familiar with those "Free Films for Educators" lists; hundreds of well-made films being shown daily to thousands of students in our schools. Most of these freebies are financed by corporations and special interest groups. These films function as public relations devices, image-building for certain products or policies.

When a Nader's Raiders group contacted me several months ago, in their investigation about corporate influence in the schools, I suggested that a useful thing for the Nader group to do would be to use my two-part pattern as the structure of a film reviewing service. An easy format here would be a divided page: on one side, the reviewer would note what is being intensified in the movie - the association devices, the skillful way the movie is composed, and so on. Oposite this, the reviewer, <u>if expert in the subject</u>, could point out what had been downplayed, what had been omitted or passed over or hidden. At present, the Nader group has teams doing about 15 different projects; I suggested they use my simple pattern, and apply their diverse expertise of subject matter.

I don't know what will become of this idea, nor do I know what my former students will do. I keep encouraging my graduate students (many of whom are high school history teachers) to take any standard history textbook, paragraph by paragraph, and note what has been omitted, note the other possible interpretations not present, or treated very slightly. When studying the Mexican war, does the text give the Texas version or the New England version?

When I say that the two-part pattern is the easiest for young people to understand, I'm not saying that this is the limit of their comprehension. But here's a starting point. Then they can be introduced to other, more sophisticated, patterns which can be logically generated from the basic pattern. For example, in Dieterich's book Teaching About Doublespeak , I have an essay which explains a four-part pattern for aggressive language: we intensify our own good; we intensify others' bad; we downplay our own bad; we downplay others' good - simultaneously. In that book, I used Watergate as an illustration. In my private publications since then, I've used the 1976 Ford-Carter campaign. Last week, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Congressional staff lawyers concerning a proposed piece of consumer legislation and pointing out how some of the intricate details of their problem could be better understood by putting them into my pattern.

If you've not satisfied with two-part or four-part patterns, I have (still unpublished) a dandy eight-part pattern, and am presently working on a 50 by 40 grid with 2,000 spaces. As Daniel Burnham - one of the great city fathers of Chicago - once said: "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood.... Make big plans, aim high in hope and work." This is the kind of inspirational stuff I read when my spirits get too low; when they start getting too high, and I need a realistic antidote, I recall the words of Graham Hallett of Cambridge: " It is not enough to have a good idea; the practical problems of implementing it must be carefully thought out if it is, in practice, to do more good than harm." Between Chicago and Cambridge, I often feel like a commuter.

-end-

INTENSIFY

INTENSIFY/DOWNPLAY is a pattern useful to analyze communication, persuasion and propaganda. All people *intensify* (commonly by *repetition, association, composition*) and *downplay* (commonly by *omission, diversion, confusion*) as they communicate in words, gestures, numbers, etc. But, "professional persuaders" have more training, technology, money and media access than the average citizen. Individuals can better cope with organized persuasion by recognizing the common ways *how* communication is intensified or downplayed, and by considering *who is saying what to whom, with what intent and what result.*

Repetition

Intensifying by repetition is an easy, simple, and effective way to persuade. People are comfortable with the *known*, the *familiar*. As children, we love to hear the same stories repeated; later, we have "favorite" songs, TV programs, etc. All cultures have chants, prayers, rituals, dances based on repetition. Advertising slogans, brand names, logos, and signs are common. Much education, training, indoctrination is based on repetition to imprint on *memory* of the receiver to identify, recognize, and *respond*.

Association

Intensifying by linking (1) the idea or product with (2) something *already loved/desired by -or hated/feared by* (3) the intended audience. Thus, need for **audience analysis**: surveys, polls, "market research," "consumer behavior," psychological and sociological studies. Associate by *direct* assertions or *indirect* ways: metaphoric language, allusions, backgrounds, contexts, etc. Terms describing common *subject matters* used to link: *Flag-Waving, God-on-Our Side, Plain Folks, Band-Wagon, Testimonials, Tribal Pride, Heritage, Progress*, etc.

Composition

Intensifying by pattern and arrangement uses *design, variations in sequence* and *in proportion* to add to the force of words, images, movements, etc. How we put together, or compose, is important: e.g. in verbal communication the choice of words, their level of abstraction, their patterns within sentences, the strategy of longer messages. **Logic**, inductive and deductive, puts ideas together systematically. **Non-verbal** compositions involve *visuals* (color, shape, size); *aural* (music); *mathematics* (quantities, relationships) *time* and *space* patterns.

Omission

Downplaying by omission is common since the basic selection/omission process *necessarily omits* more than can be presented. All communication is limited, is edited, is slanted or biased to include and exclude items. But omission can also be used as a *deliberate* way of concealing, hiding. Half-truths, quotes out of context, etc. are very hard to detect or find. Political examples include *cover-ups, censorship, book-burning, managed news, secret police activities*. Receivers, too, can omit: can "filter out" or be closed minded, prejudiced.

Diversion

Downplaying by distracting focus, diverting attention away from key issues or important things; usually by intensifying the side-issues, the non-related, the trivial. Common variations include: *"hairsplitting," "nit-picking," "attacking a straw man," "red herring"*; also, those emotional attacks and appeals (*ad hominem, ad populum*), plus things which drain the energy of others: *"busy work," legal harassment*, etc. Humor and entertainment (*"bread and circuses"*) are used as pleasant ways to divert attention from major issues.

Confusion

Downplaying issues by making things so complex, so chaotic, that people "give up," get weary, "overloaded." This is dangerous when people are unable to understand, comprehend, or make reasonable decisions. Chaos can be the accidental result of a disorganized mind, or the deliberate flim-flam of a *con man*, or the political *demagogue* (who then offers a "simple solution" to the confused.) Confusion can result from *faulty logic, equivocation, circumlocution, contradictions, multiple diversions, inconsistencies, jargon* or anything which blurs clarity or understanding.

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DOWNPLAY